

Kiss Kiss Fall In Love: Queer Space, Gender and Sexuality vs. Traditional Systems of Power in Anime

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Abstract: Since its emergence in the late 20th century, anime, or Japanese animation, has grown in increasing global popularity, with strong ties to consumerism and fan culture. Our work will integrate Japanese cultural studies, anime studies, and queer studies as a synthesized lens with which to examine the popular television series, *Ouran High School Host Club*. Using existing literature on Japanese culture, particularly the club and educational system, as well as queer concepts such as Camp and queer time and space, we will offer a close textual analysis of several episodes of *Ouran High School Host Club*. Additional lenses include evaluation of the formal elements of animation and common anime motifs. Our paper will examine how the host club space constructs queerness by obscuring heterosexuality and gender conformance through costume and a play with sensuality and eroticism. By focusing on sequences where outside characters, who conform to the traditional power structures, interact with the queer space of the host club, we will observe how the club either transforms or defeats these characters. Through our examination of the conflict between queerness and the systems of power in *Ouran High School Host Club*, we will indicate further questions for analysing other anime works.

Narrative

Introduction

Anime, a style of Japanese animation that emerged in the late 20th century has become a booming pop culture phenomenon in both Japan and across the world. Susan Napier writes in her book *Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke* about how Anime has become a cultural and commercial force with a vast interplay with consumer culture (Napier). Not only do Anime works themselves have wide audiences internationally, but the enfranchisement of popular series, expanding across mediums from video games to merchandise to even stage plays, contributes greatly to the entertainment industry (Condry). As Anime's reach expands, its influence on pop culture grows as well. Therefore, it is vital to analyze Anime as both a cultural product situated within Japanese society and as a prominent force within today's entertainment industry.

In the 2006 anime *Ouran High School Host Club*, protagonist Harui switches gender presentation throughout the series several times per episode as she poses as a member of a male host club dedicated to pleasing female students (*Ouran High School Host Club*). The fluid gender expression of that character and the non normative space and time created in the series interact with depictions of systems of social class and power. Several of the students at the high school belong to influential and traditional families. These confrontations between radically queer spaces/characters and traditional power structures requires further study building upon existing literature in the fields of animation studies and gender and sexuality studies.

Background/Related Works and Motivations

Anime also draws from Japanese cultural traditions such as Woodblock printing (Napier) and Kabuki (Darlington). Through analyzing the formal elements of Anime and their function as commentary on Japanese culture, one can see the continuity of storytelling and creative form,

linking the future of representation within Anime to Japan's artistic history. Both past storytelling styles including Kabuki and current Anime series utilize distinct dramatic and formal aspects to portray nuanced social thought including commentary on fluid gender and sexuality. For example, the show *Ramona 1/2* includes a main character who fluidly transforms between male and female throughout the series (Napier). The fluid animation style allows Anime series to create a portrayal of queerness of sexuality and gender distinct from live-action television. Therefore, it is important to analyse how Anime can distinctly construct queerness of gender and sexuality. Often, this nonconformist expression stands opposed to traditional systems of power, gender and family (Napier). Throughout the mid to late 20th century in Japan, a nuclear family model surrounding the middle class salary man and his domestic wife rose to prominence (Aoyama). Through analyzing how Anime constructs fluid gender and sexuality in a way that could function to counter traditional ideals of family and power, one can examine how media can counter conformist societal systems. As ideas about gender, sexuality and representation expand, one must continue to explore how distinct mediums and genres construct identity in a way that either challenges or confirms traditional structures of power.

We hope to synthesize literature from the fields of Anime studies, Japanese Cultural studies, and Queer Gender and Sexuality studies to create a framework for our research and expand the current literature to look more specifically at queer gender and sexuality, serialized Anime, and traditional structures of power within Japanese culture. The field of Anime studies includes scholarship on both the common tropes and themes of Anime, such as Susan Napier's book *Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke*, and works on the collaborative creation of Anime including Ian Condry's *The Soul of Anime : Collaborative Creativity and Japan's Media Success Story*. Additionally, books such as Giannalberto Bendazzi's *Animation: a World History : Volume*

III: Contemporary Times, lay a broader overview for the history of Anime's inception and expansion within a global context. These works create a foundation for understanding both the rise of Anime as a popular medium and the development of tropes and storytelling processes specific to Anime. I hope to use the information from these sources to inform my analysis of Anime tropes and style in *Ouran High School Host Club*, and how these elements create queer gender and sexuality.

Sources such as "The Queering of Haruhi Fujioka: Cross-Dressing, Camp and Commoner Culture in *Ouran High School Host Club*." by Tania Darlington, and *Genders, Transgenders and Sexualities in Japan*, edited by Mark McLelland, and Romit Dasgupta look more specifically at queer gender and sexuality within both Anime and other aspects of Japanese culture. I can build upon these works to look at how Anime series such as *Ouran High School Host Club* depict queer gender and sexuality as opposing traditional systems of power within the context of Japanese culture. To understand these systems of power, particularly as they pertain to family, I can use literature in the field of Japanese cultural studies such as *Configurations of Family in Contemporary Japan* edited by Tomoko Aoyama. I hope to expand on the existing literature that looks at traditional societal systems in Japan, queer gender and sexuality in Anime, and Anime in general in looking at *Ouran High School School*. In our examinations we will look at a key question. How do depictions of fluid gender and sexuality confront traditional systems of power in Anime? Along with my partner Jenna Valentine, I hope to explore the answer to this question.

Method

Film studies research is qualitative and applies a framework derived from relevant scholarly sources to different forms of media through a close analysis of a certain genre or text. We will base our method in these practices.

The first section of our method will be to analyze relevant scholarly sources to define the terms we will be applying to the Anime series that we study. Beginning with an analysis of queer theory, we will provide synthesized definitions of gender and sexuality. We will also review literature on how play with gender and sexuality can subvert traditional institutions.

Delving into Japanese cultural studies, we will dissect societal conventions and institutions of power situated in the cultural context of Japan. Through this research, we will better understand the political systems represented in the Anime texts we will be analyzing. Finally, we will review the relevant literature around film studies, Anime studies and animation studies, to build an understanding of the formal and narrative elements of the Anime into our framework. We will complete a comprehensive literature review of the relevant scholarly works in the field of film studies, queer studies, Anime studies, animation studies and Japanese cultural studies.

After cultivating an academic understanding of sociopolitical institutions and elements of film, we will utilize our interdisciplinary framework in order to begin a close textual analysis of the relevant Anime series. We will analyze the expressions of gender and sexuality in relation to systems of power represented in the series. We will examine formal elements of Anime, such as how the animated medium allows for quick shifts in physical appearance and expression in *Ouran High School Host Club*, as well as queer space and time.

Finally, after completing our analysis, we will determine our conclusions to our original question of how these Anime series represent the confrontation of fluidity of gender and sexuality and traditional system of power in the context of Japanese culture. We will be using sequences from the text as evidence, interpreted through our multidisciplinary framework. From

this conclusion, we will also examine the further implications for the field of media studies. We will then write a paper compiling our research and our conclusions.

Expected Results

We will end up with a paper that analyses several sequences in *Ouran High School Host Club*, to conclude how these sequences construct queer space, gender and sexuality, and how these elements confront traditional systems of power. We will look at how distinct dramatic and formal elements of Anime contribute to this construction of fluidity. The paper will include in-depth textual analysis that looks at specific evidence from the sequences, such as the function of the piano room in the series and the interaction of characters that represent societal institutions with the club to draw our conclusions. Our paper will include a framework devised from existing scholarly works that expand upon foundational articles in Japanese cultural studies, Queer studies, and Anime studies to substantiate our research. We will end our paper exploring both the limitations of our own study and the implications of our conclusion for representation of queerness in Anime.

Conclusion

As Anime's popularity continues to rise both locally and globally, scholars must continue to approach the medium critically. Due to its distinct formal and dramatic qualities, Anime has a unique ability to depict queerness of gender and sexuality. As it exists within a specific Japanese cultural context, the construction of queer space and characters interact with depictions of traditional Japanese systems of power. The show *Ouran High School Host Club* uses elements of Anime to depict the confrontation between the nonconforming and fluid and the conforming and rigid. Therefore, a close textual analysis of the series with a basis in queer studies, Anime studies, and Japanese cultural studies, can reveal how Anime portrays queer gender and sexuality

in conflict with traditional systems of power. We hope to conduct this analysis to draw greater conclusions about the power of the visual medium of Anime to both represent fluid gender and sexuality and combat outdated systems of power.

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Budget

<u>Description of Expense</u>	<u>Cost</u>
Compensation for 20 hours a week for one researcher for 6 weeks at minimum wage (20 * 6 * 15)	\$1800
Netflix subscription for two months to watch series at \$9.00 a month	\$18
TOTAL	\$1818

Timeline

Week 1 -

- I will use LMU library website and JSTOR to identify relevant scholarly works in the fields of film studies, queer theory studies, animation studies, anime studies and Japanese cultural studies.
- I will finish compiling at least 25 sources for literature review.
- I will complete deliverable of bibliography of sources.
- I will begin reading and annotating sources.

Week 2 -

- I will review and annotate sources compiled.
- I will create pages of notes on the sources, including page numbers for our final paper.
- I will complete the portion of the paper dedicated to background information/literature review.
- I will identify key information about Japanese culture that will be relevant to my viewing of *Ouran High School Host Club*.
- I will identify key elements of anime formal aesthetics and dramatic tropes that may be relevant to my analysis of *Ouran High School Host Club*.
- By the end of this week, I will have completed a review of the literature that will be used in our analysis.

Week 3

- I will watch the first 13 episodes of *Ouran High School Host Club*.
- I will take notes on relevant sequences that respond to the question that we are answering and that relate to the notes taken on the relevant scholarly sources.

- I will capture screenshots from the episodes that demonstrate examples of queer characters and queer space in *Ouran High School Host Club*.
- I will meet with my research partner and mentor to discuss our findings and how they relate to our previous research in Japanese cultural studies and queer gender and sexuality studies.
- I will begin to organize my notes into an outline under subsections that relate to the depiction of queer space in *Ouran High School Host Club*, such as constructing queerness through camp.

Week 4

- I will watch the final 13 episodes of *Ouran High School Club*.
- I will continue to take notes on the relevant sequences that pertain to the questions that we are answering about the conflict of queerness and power structures in the series.
- I will continue to capture screenshots from the episodes that demonstrate examples of queer characters and queer space in *Ouran High School Host Club*.
- I will continue to meet with my research partner and mentor to discuss our findings and how they relate to our previous research in Japanese cultural studies and queer gender and sexuality studies.
- I will continue to organize my analysis of the sequences of *Ouran High School Host Club* under subsections relating to the depiction of queer space and its confrontation with traditional power structures, such as the queer space conflicting with the most powerful institutions of family and corporation in the final episodes.

Week 5

- I will determine which sequences from the show as a whole will be most effective in demonstrating our analysis of the conflict between queer gender and sexuality in *Ouran High School Host Club*.
- I will flush out my outline of the final paper, after meeting with my research partner to discuss the best directions to go with for our final deliverable.
- I will decide which information from the literature review will benefit the final written analysis most.
- By the end of this week I will have a detailed outline of the final paper and our argument about how *Ouran High School Host Club* constructs queerness of space and characters and how those spaces and characters confront traditional systems of power.
- I will discuss with my research partner who is writing which sections of the paper based on our outline.

Week 6

- I will write half of the paper using the outline, as determined between me and my research partner.
- I will integrate the information from the scholarly sources on queer gender and sexuality studies, animation studies and Japanese cultural studies with the evidence found in the sequences from *Ouran High School Host Club* to write an explanation of our analysis.
- I will meet with my research partner and mentor to give and receive feedback on our respective sections of the paper.
- I will write the conclusion to the paper with my research partner to indicate the limitations of our analysis and the implications for the fields of anime studies and queer studies as a whole and directions for further research.

- I will revise and proofread the final paper.
- By the end of this week we should have a paper communicating our research question, literature review, methods, evidence compiled and conclusion.